



"SANITARIA,"

OR,

Homes for Discharged, Disabled Soldiers.

Now that the excitement of actual war is over, and the demand upon the men and women at home for thought, time, money, and supplies for sick and wounded soldiers has nearly ceased, people are turning their attention to the question of how best to provide permanently for those soldiers who have been disabled in the service. And it is one of the questions which require a great deal of careful thought. There has been a vast amount of earnest philanthropy aroused by this war, and the ardent feeling cannot at once be put to sleep in its old ways. For a while, at least, it must be allowed to *spend itself* upon something. Yet it will, because of its very force, require guidance and constraint, and the influence of men who insist upon slower steps and patient investigation, else in its earnestness it will do unwise things.

There is a feeling in the community that too much cannot, by any possibility, be done for the men who have become disabled in the war; that do all we may for their comfort, we shall never half repay them for the sacrifices they have made, or half balance our debt of personal gratitude. All this is true, provided what we do for them is done in the right way. But on the other hand, if we make these soldiers the recipients of an indiscriminate charity, if we seize upon them as the objects upon which we may *work off* this nervous philanthropic excitability, and count the benefit rendered by the numbers we get into asylums, where they can live without care or labor on their part, then we shall do more harm than good—a great deal, by such endeavors—pure and right as the motive may be. To keep ten men, who naturally, almost necessarily, drift that way, out of an asylum of ease and comfort, by teaching them how to use for self support what muscle they have left, is a far better work than to provide, year by year, food and shelter and liberal care for ten other men equally disabled. Yet this is just the point which the community in its generous earnestness is in danger of overlooking.

What we want in this country, if we are to establish any national or State "Sanitaria" or "Disabled Soldiers' Homes," is to have them as truly American as this war has been; we want them to show upon the face of them that the people themselves, with their practical good sense, have been thinking about them, and have really put into them their best and calmest thought, as well as their money and their sympathies. We want something which the nation shall be proud of, not chiefly because of the evidence of unstinted liberality, but because, also, of the common sense embodied in it. We want to seize upon the opportunity now offered, and bring to bear upon the treatment of this subject the best principles of modern social science, as specially applied to a comparatively new question. We want to follow no ambitious examples of the old world, or emulate those who in charitable institutions seek to build monuments. We want to lose sight entirely of the questions of whether marble towers look better than pine barracks, while we keep our eye on the larger thought of how we can best and soonest restore these disabled men, so far as is possible, to their homes and into the working community—get them absorbed into the mass, or rather reorganize them into the living body again, from which for the time perhaps, in their condition of helplessness, they had unavoidably become separated. Just in this regard is where, as Americans, we are to show our faith in the healing powers of our republican homes and our republican industries; that, in our belief, no asylum or fostering protection is equal to it; that though such sheltering care, life long, may perhaps do for men of other nations, it will never do for the disabled men of this nation, where the army was made up of those who, when they went into the ranks, left homes which spurned alike dependence and indolent ease.

The question therefore now is this: how to use wisely this popular enthusiasm, and yet not be carried away by it—how to show our appreciation of its worth, and yet not yield to any unreasonable suggestions; also, how to meet the demand which the public, and in fact the necessities of the disabled men themselves, are making upon us, and yet be true to the other demand made by this 19th century and our republican institutions. In short, the question now is, how to do the work obviously in hand, and yet not *overdo* it.

Some few points of practical importance may here be specified in accordance with the general principles above indicated.

1st. A Sanitarium should be not merely an "asylum," but also a workshop, and a school, and a home. As a first principle, the idea of indolent ease should find no place there, except in the rooms of those utterly and totally disabled. A central purpose of the institution should be to provide facilities and inducements for the development of productive power in these partially disabled men, so that they may be able as soon as possible to support themselves. These facilities would embrace careful instruction in various arts or branches of business, according to the physical ability or mental capacity of the different men. The inducements would consist in opening to the men the

use of workshops, farm lands, gardens, and the like, as well as play grounds and reading rooms. Inducements would also be found in the tone which should be infused through the whole establishment of self-respect and personal independence, based on the consciousness in each man of his trying every day to do his part in the world honestly, according to the measure of power or number of limbs left to him by the war. Thus would self-reliance also be maintained; and quickly would men learn to make one set of muscles perform the work of two, and the left hand take the place of the right, and the brain and one arm earn the living which before was earned by the two arms, the brain having been but little used. This development of productive power in all the inmates should be an essential aim and prominent feature of a Sanitarium, and that special work should be under the charge of eminent and competent men, who would make this their sole business; thus to overcome the obstacles, not a few, and to provide all possible facilities and inducements for securing this condition of self-help, and consequent self-reliance, followed by self-respect.

This broader plan, with this larger provision—Asylum, Infirmary, Agency for Productive Industry—can alone meet the demands made at the present day upon intelligent philanthropy.

II. In connection with the Sanitarium should be a system of correspondence with reliable men or organized aid societies, especially "Bureaus of Employment," in principal towns and cities, so that situations and helping hands might be secured for all the inmates of these "Homes" as fast as they might be able and inclined to try the world again.

III. As to medical and surgical treatment, the aim should be, not merely to secure average skill and care, so as to keep the men comfortable in their present state, but provision should be made at every Sanitarium for an infirmary, where the very highest skill could bring to bear all the arts and appliances of modern surgical and medical science, with large and patient working, furnishing here to the disabled soldier such medical or surgical treatment, and an opportunity for improvement or recovery, such as could not possibly be guaranteed to any individual at his own home, even if he were able to pay for it.

IV. Another important point is this: the conditions under which inmates are to be admitted to the Sanitarium. Among soldiers who have been sick or wounded there will be, beside many honest men, some knaves, men who were knaves before they received their wounds and are none the less so now. While nine-tenths of all the other disabled soldiers, with laudable ambition, will strive for self-support, nine-tenths of all this class will seek to live on charity, and they will point to their wounds as giving them a right to claim such support. These are the men who, with plausible story, will try to impose upon such an institution as a home for disabled soldiers, and once within the walls they will never gain strength either to work there or to go out into the world. These are the men who, if carelessly admitted, will bring censure and disgrace on the institution and its system. There must, therefore, be a peculiarly wise method adopted to determine the admission of inmates, with ample safe-guards, which shall, indeed, not keep the worthy soldier waiting at the door for a single hour, but at the same time shall not allow an easily excited sympathy to open wide the gates to every man who wears "soldier's clothes" and leans on a crutch. Humanity and worldly wisdom must stand at the porch and counsel together.

V. In regard to the character of buildings to be erected, it should correspond to the work in hand. To build costly structures for a service which we trust is to end with the lives of our present veteran soldiers surely were not wise or becoming. You want what is substantial, and the very best of its kind; but you do not want to put into useless material and showy style what ought to go toward securing additional home-comforts and other aids to the disabled soldiers. Yet so surely as different States take up the work of establishing Sanitaria, unless this point is most carefully guarded, your eye will be pained with ambitious display in rival structures, from which contractors will grow rich, and on which politicians will stand to make flattering speeches.

VI. Whatever is to be attempted in the direction of providing this form of relief should be entered upon at once. The discharged soldiers will never again need the help as much as they do to-day. If you lay out plans so broad, and erect structures so large that it will take a year to finish them, many of the men for whom these Sanitaria are intended will be dead before your welcome is ready to be offered.

The need of National or State Sanitaria has all along been assumed, and cannot be doubted. Precisely how large a provision will have to be made for this class of men, who have been rendered partially or wholly helpless while in the service, and who have no means of support, it is impossible to determine. Of this, however, we may feel sure, that under these institutions wisely organized, and with fit restrictions, the demand for help of this form will be by no means as great as some persons have been led to suppose. Six months from now, or even three months from now, we can form a better judgment. The U. S. Sanitary Commission has for the last year and more been pur-

suing a series of inquiries for the purpose of having in hand the material for answering, approximately at least, that very inquiry. And it has thereby collected much valuable information. Taking in order, one by one, all the men from the Army of the Potomac, who during a given time were discharged on account of disability, (almost all of whom in the course of their journey home have come under the care of the Sanitary Commission at a "Lodge" or "Home,") answers carefully obtained from some seven thousand men have been recorded to the following questions, viz:

- "1. Name?
- "2. Regiment?
- "3. Age?
- "4. Have you any family, and what?
- "5. Are they dependent on you for support?
- "6. Have you any property, and what amount?
- "7. What were your means of support before you enlisted?
- "8. Are you able now to work at the same trade or occupation?
- "9. Is there any other trade or occupation you can work at?
- "10. How do you expect to support yourself, or to be supported, after you get home?
- "11. Have you any established home, and where?
- "12. What is the nature and degree of your disability?
- "13. Have you secured a pension, and what is the amount?"

The answers to these questions indicate that about seventeen per cent. of these men are what is called totally disabled; about sixteen per cent. are "seriously disabled," but in a condition which admits of gradual but decided improvement; while about nineteen per cent. are affected with various degrees of disability, all along on the scale between slight and serious, but permanent. The other forty-eight per cent. form a class of men all of whom will at once readily earn their living, and one half of them will probably be well at the end of the year.

Again, the Sanitary Commission, in order to approach the subject from another side, has obtained answers to a different set of questions, thereby seeking to know the actual condition of discharged disabled soldiers after they had been six months or so in the community from which they enlisted. These inquiries have usually been addressed to some individuals whose interest in the cause led to a thorough investigation. The following are the questions:

- "1. To what extent do the disabled discharged soldiers in your community fail, at present, to maintain themselves by their own labor?
- "2. What proportion of them have relatives wholly or in part dependent upon them?
- "3. What proportion of those who would not, in the open market of competition be able permanently to earn a support for themselves and for those dependent upon them will receive all needed assistance from their relatives?
- "4. For those who do not thus receive all needed assistance from relatives, what method of assistance now prevails?
- "5. What proportion of discharged disabled soldiers have evinced a disposition or expectation to receive charitable assistance?
- "6. What proportion of disabled discharged soldiers in your vicinity have come distinctly upon the public for support?
- "7. Has any systematic method to save the soldiers from this necessity, by finding suitable employment for those who are able to work, been adopted, which is open to all who may come into your community?"

The result of this investigation, carried through some forty-eight or fifty of the chief cities and larger towns of the North, shows a far smaller number than the other table would indicate of those who as yet have actually come upon the public for support. But in this inquiry we are to weigh the fact that many who six months from now will be entirely dependent are at present living on their bounty money and back pay collected on discharge. Yet, too, there is the other modifying circumstance to come in, viz, that many of the men unable at the time of discharge to labor, will in six months or a year afterwards acquire strength enough to earn at least part of their own livelihood. The results of the investigations now carried on by the Commission will furnish some valuable facts additional. Meantime enough is evident to show that some such institutions as Sanitaria are demanded for our discharged disabled soldiers.

The object of this article is to draw attention to the importance of securing to this subject, wherever it is taken up, wise thought, that whatever is done be done in a way that shall strengthen and not weaken what is peculiar and excellent in our republican commonwealth, bound in with the homes of the people.

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Supt. of Special Relief, U. S. Sanitary Commission.

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 5, 1865.

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ALMA MATER

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